



*Virginia Commission on Youth*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**CONFERENCE ON IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR VA'S YOUTH STARTS SUNDAY IN ROANOKE**  
*First Lady, VA legislators, national and local experts to speak at conference*

**RICHMOND** – In an effort to improve mental health services for Virginia's young people and their families, the Virginia Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services (DMHMRSAS) and the Virginia Commission on Youth are partnering to convene a statewide conference on September 16-18, 2007 in Roanoke. On Sunday, September 16, First Lady Anne Holton will speak and host a panel of Virginia youth involved in her For Keeps initiative.

The conference, titled, "Systems of Care and Evidence-based Practices: Tools that Work for Youth and Families," will educate over 500 behavioral health professionals, juvenile justices representatives, caregivers, families and youth from across the Commonwealth on how to implement proven methods in our communities and improve coordination among the agencies that serve children.

"Too many youth do not receive the mental health services they need early enough and this can result in later problems, including being placed in a residential or hospital setting away from their family. This is painful for families and often is not the best treatment for the child" said Dr. James Reinhard, DMHMRSAS commissioner. "By learning how to utilize practices we know work on the local level, we can encircle the child with the best care possible and increase his or her chances for recovery and future success in school and later in life."

An overview of the conference agenda is as follows:

- *Sunday, September 16, 5:30 -7:30 p.m. – Conference Dinner featuring The First Lady of Virginia, Anne Holton, Delegate John Reid, Delegate William Fralin, and DMHMRSAS Deputy Commissioner Ray Ratke*
- *Monday, September 17, 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. – Implementing an effective system of care in your community*
- *Tuesday, September 18, 8 a.m.-3:30 p.m. – Focus on evidence-based and promising practices within community systems of care.*

"This timely conference is about creating positive change in Virginia for children with behavioral health care needs," said Amy Atkinson, executive director of the Virginia Commission on Youth. "The response and the level of excitement from the various state and local child-serving agencies; private and public sectors; and family members have been tremendous as communities across the Commonwealth join together to implement evidence-based treatments within a system of care. Virginia is ready for a change."

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Background information:

- DMHMRSAS estimates each year, more than 75,000 young Virginians experience the symptoms of a serious mental illness or emotional disturbance.
- According to the American Psychiatric Association, 12 million U.S. children suffer from mental illness but only one in five receives treatment.
- Virginia's Department of Juvenile Justice estimates that 50 percent of all youth involved in the system have mental health and/or substance abuse disorders.
- Residential and hospital treatment is very costly to Virginia. But sometimes, due to a lack of community services including evidence-based practices, there is no other choice.
- New "evidence-based" treatments are supported by research that shows that they work. These treatments intervene with both the youth and their family addressing mental health and substance abuse problems and reducing the involvement of youth in criminal justice system.
- "Systems of Care" is a philosophy that simply means that all of the community agencies work together with families to create a system that encircles the child with good care.

Because of high interest for this conference, capacity has been met and public registration is now closed, but media are invited to attend. The Hotel Roanoke and Conference Center is located at 110 Shenandoah Avenue in Roanoke, VA 24016. More information can be found at the conference website at [www.cpe.vt.edu/scep](http://www.cpe.vt.edu/scep). For media interested in covering this event, please call Meghan McGuire at (804) 241-6876 or Amy Atkinson at (804) 371-2482.

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**About the Virginia Commission on Youth:** *The Virginia Commission on Youth is a bipartisan, standing legislative commission of the General Assembly comprised of 12 members (six Delegates, three Senators, and three citizens) that, by mandate, provides a legislative forum in which complex issues may be explored and resolved. In addition, the Commission monitors the development of laws and policies in federal, state, and local governments which impact youth and their families and contribute to the General Assembly's ability to make sound policy decisions based on well-studied and reasoned recommendations.*

**About the VA Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services:** *The Virginia Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services (DMHMRSAS) provides services that are available to citizens statewide. Virginia's public mental health, mental retardation and substance abuse services system is comprised of 40 community services boards (CSBs) and 16 state facilities. DMHMRSAS seeks to promote dignity, choice, recovery, and the highest possible level of participation in work, relationships, and all aspects of community life for these individuals with mental health, mental retardation or substance abuse disorders.*